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THE DESIGN OF OBJECTIVE DIAGNOSTIC AND ATTAINMENT TESTS OF AN AURAL-ORAL COMMAND OF FRENCH.

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THE INCREASED EMPHASIS ON THE AUDIOLINGUAL SKILLS REQUIRES NEW APPROACHES IN TESTING. THESE SKILLS CAN BE SEPARATED INTO SEVERAL AREAS FOR WHICH GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVE TESTS CAN BE CONSTRUCTED. EXAMPLES OF GROUP TESTS ARE AURAL WORD-RECOGNITION TESTS AND TESTS OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION. TESTS WHICH MUST BE ADMINISTERED INDIVIDUALLY ARE THOSE DEALING WITH AURAL PERCEPTION OF DIFFICULT SOUNDS, ORAL PRODUCTION OF DIFFICULT SOUNDS, ORAL SELF-EXPRESSION BASED ON PICTORIAL STIMULI, AND ORAL INTERVIEWS WHICH COMBINE SOUND PRODUCTION, AURAL COMPREHENSION, AND ORAL EXPRESSION. THESE OBJECTIVE TESTS CAN BE USED BOTH AS ATTAINMENT TESTS TO ASSESS THE STANDARD ACHIEVEMENT AT CERTAIN MAIN POINTS OF THE COURSE AND AS DIAGNOSTIC INSTRUMENTS TO POINT UP DEFICIENCIES REQUIRING FURTHER ATTENTION. OBJECTIVE TESTS MUST BE CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED, BUT CAN BE SCORED QUICKLY AND DO NOT REQUIRE THE TEACHER TO MAKE VALUE JUDGMENTS. IF THE TEACHER CAREFULLY PREPARES THE STUDENT ANSWER SHEETS AND HIS OWN SCORING SHEET FOR THE TESTS, THE ADMINISTRATION AND SCORING CAN BE DONE EFFICIENTLY. EXAMPLES ARE GIVEN FOR EACH TYPE OF TEST ITEM FOR FRENCH, WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTING, ADMINISTERING, AND SCORING THEM. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "BABEL," VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2, JULY 1965. (AM)

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The Design of Objective Diagnostic and Attainment Tests of an Aural-Oral Command of French

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INCREASING attention is being given in French teaching in Australia to the aural-oral approach to the teaching and learning of the language. In some quarters the name given to the approach is "audio-lingual", due, it is fair to say, to many Americans' inability to say or hear "aural" and "oral" as distinct from one another! Both names may be regarded as synonymous, in that both imply that prime importance in the first stages at least of language learning should be given to understanding the language as spoken by a native-speaker of French and to speaking the language in such a way as to make it readily comprehensible to a native-speaker of French.

The period during which reading and writing in French are delayed varies with various courses. All that the term "aural-oral" implies is that *first* work on any new item of French should be aural-oral. There is no reason why consolidation of aural-oral work on each item can not follow immediately after the aural-oral treatment of that item, particularly in French for Australian pupils, since no new script is involved.

Leaving on one side questions of the stage of the course at which reading and writing in French are introduced, and devoting our attention only to the aural-oral aspects of the language, we can say that the following ingredients are involved in an aural-oral command of French:

- the ability to recognise and to produce the vowel sounds and the consonant sounds of French, particularly those which closely contrast with one another and are normally confused by English-speaking pupils;
- the ability to recognise and produce known French words, particularly those containing French sounds which are difficult for English-speaking pupils;
- the ability to attach meaning to French words heard in context;
- the ability to choose French words appropriate to context when speaking French;
- the ability to react to French sentence structure as the device giving overall meaning to French sentences when they are heard;
- the ability to use French sentence structure appropriately when speaking French;
- the ability to recognise word-boundaries when listening to French and in particular

to realise when liaison conceals word-boundaries;

- the ability to react to and to produce French speech-phrasing and French intonation when these differ from English.

It should be noted that an aural-oral command is conceived as including a command of French sentence structure. In particular, the aural-oral aspects of French sentence structure should receive emphasis. For example, written French uses the two forms *mon* and *ma*, but spoken French uses three forms—*mon chapeau*, *ma chemise* and *mon oreille*.

How can an aural-oral command of French be tested objectively?

Traditionally, an aural-oral command of a language has been tested by means of an interview, which has tended to be assessed subjectively. However, as will be seen later in this article, even an interview can be assessed objectively.

From one point of view, an interview at which a pupil performs satisfactorily might be regarded as all that is needed in the way of testing. However, an interview which would adequately cover the content of the pupil's aural-oral course might well need too much time for its administration to each pupil in turn.

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From another point of view, tests which all pupils can take simultaneously may well reduce the length of those tests in which pupils have to be interviewed one by one. There are a number of areas of an aural-oral command of French that can be tested through group tests. Thus it is possible to break up an aural-oral command of French into a number of areas, some of which will need individual testing of short duration with each pupil, and some of which will be tested through group tests.

This article presents a number of types of test appropriate to the testing of an aural-oral command of French. All the types of test may be used for *diagnostic* purposes or for purposes of *attainment* testing. *Diagnostic tests* assess the effectiveness of the pupils' learning (and of the teacher's teaching, and of the course materials) at intervals throughout the course, and should be used as the basis for remedial teaching. *Attainment tests* assess the standard of the command of French achieved at certain main points of the course, possibly with the desire of passing or failing pupils.

Two basic assumptions need to be stated before we pass to a consideration of the construction of individual types of objective test. These are:

- (a) The measure of how well a pupil has learnt French is the extent to which he has mastered those difficulties which exist in French for pupils who speak English as their mother-tongue.
- (b) It is largely a waste of testing time to test items which are known to cause no difficulty to English-speaking pupils.

While we do not exclude non-difficult items when we are teaching French, we do not need to clutter up our objective testing with items which cause no difficulty at all.

Objective tests, consisting of a large number of small items, can be very searching in assessing pupils' aural-oral command of French. Moreover, they are very easy for teachers to score. When cyclostyled answer sheets are used, a scoring mask can be prepared for each answer sheet, with the correct answers indicated.

For examination purposes, a group of objective tests would cover a number of areas and would provide a large number of test items, on each of which the pupil would be either right or wrong. Value judgments tend not to be required from the person administering the test and scoring it.

1.—Objective tests of aural perception of difficult French sounds

The raw material for tests of aural perception of difficult French sounds is the "minimal pair" — a pair of words which are identical except that one of a confusable pair of French sounds occurs in a certain position in one word, while the other of the pair of sounds occurs in the same position in the other word. For example, *vous* — *vu*, *tout* — *tu*, *roue* — *rue* and *nous* — *nu* are minimal pairs.

Objective tests of aural perception are essentially *group tests*. Pupils have an answer sheet in front of them and mark their assessment of each spoken item on the answer sheet. Particularly if the same test is to be given to a number of groups of pupils, the spoken test items can be made objective by being recorded in advance to avoid variation.

1A.—"Same/Different" test of aural perception

Pupils listen to each pair of words they hear, and merely tick their choice of answer on a cyclostyled answer sheet in front of them. The answer sheet might begin in the following way:

Example A: *Same* . . (V)
 Different ()

Example B: *Same* . . ()
 Different (V)
1. *Same* . . ()
 Different ()
2. *Same* . . ()
 Different ()
3. *Same* . . ()
 Different ()

The answer sheet would continue for as many items as are included in the test. Note that the correct answer for each of the two examples is already marked on the answer sheet. A test is fairest if examples are included so that one can be sure that pupils understand what they have to do before the test begins.

The two words spoken each time as a test item should be identical in all respects if they are "the same", and should be identical in all respects except one if they are "different". They should start at the same pitch; they should have the same downwards intonation-curve; they should both end at the same lower pitch; and neither should be specially emphasised. The teacher's script might read:

"Example A: *Vous*. — *Vous*.

They are the same! The tick is alongside the word 'same'.

Example B: *Vu*. — *Vous*.

They are different! The tick is alongside the word 'different'.

You will hear *two words* each time. Decide whether they are *the same word said twice*, or

two different words. Put a tick alongside what you consider is the right answer. Are you ready?

- Number One: *Loup.* — *Lu.*
(PAUSE)
Number Two: *Fait.* — *Fait.*
(PAUSE)
Number Three: *Brun.* — *Brun.*
(PAUSE)
Number Four: *Fait.* — *Fée.*
(PAUSE)
Number Five: *Brin.* — *Brun.*
(PAUSE)
Number Six: *Peigne.* — *Peine.*
(PAUSE)
Number Seven: *Joue.* — *Joue.*
(PAUSE)
Number Eight: *Rue.* — *Rue.*
(PAUSE)
Number Nine: *Fie.* — *Fée.*
(PAUSE)
Number Ten: *Digne.* — *Digne.*
(PAUSE)"

and so on.

Note that there should be no obvious pattern in the occurrences of "same" and "different" answers. Otherwise, if there were a predictable pattern, pupils might be able to get the right answers without really listening accurately.

1B.—"Which word is different?" test of aural perception

This is a very useful type of test of aural perception, since it minimises the chances of pupils' guessing the correct answer each time. It is therefore probably the most suitable form of aural perception test for examination purposes. However, it is just as suitable for regular testing by the teacher. Teachers who use this type of test regularly would do well to have an answer sheet cyclostyled in fairly large numbers, since the same answer sheet will suit any choice of sounds being tested. The lay-out of the answer sheet is set out below:

WHICH WORD IS DIFFERENT?	Example A	Example B	Example C	Example D	Example E
First word different					
Second word different					
Third word different					
All words different					
All words THE SAME					

WHICH WORD IS DIFFERENT?	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8
First word different								
Second word different								
Third word different								
All words different								
All words THE SAME								

Similar frames, each providing space for eight items, may be laid out down the page, with the next frame providing for items 9-16, the next for items 17-24, and so on.

The five examples should be worked separately, the teacher checking after he gives each example to make sure that pupils have understood what to do. The items used for four of the examples could well embody gross sound contrasts (e.g. *Vie.* — *Vous.* — *Vie.*) as an aid in teaching pupils how to react to the

test items. The remaining example should, of course, be the same word spoken three times. Thus the five examples might be:

- Example A: *Vie.* — *Vous.* — *Vie.*
Example B: *Fie.* — *Fou.* — *Fait.*
Example C: *Chou.* — *Tout.* — *Tout.*
Example D: *Chat.* — *Chat.* — *Chat.*
Example E: *Vous.* — *Vous.* — *Roue.*

The actual test items should be based on "minimal pairs" of words in all cases except the one or two items which are "All words different" and the one or two items which are

"All words the same". The majority of test items, however, will have one word different from the other two words. Basing the test item on a minimal pair involving a confusable sound contrast, use one of the words once and the other word twice. For example, in constructing an item based on the *fi* — *fée* sound contrast, either take *fi* once and *fée* twice, or take *fi* twice and *fée* once. Make certain that the position of the "different" word is not predictable as the test progresses. Distribute the "different" word at random in the three possible positions as you make up the list of actual items you are going to test.

As with the "Same/Different" type of aural perception test, it is important that the three words of each item should be said with an identical falling intonation, starting at the same pitch and falling to the same pitch. With three-word items, it is particularly important that you should avoid giving any special emphasis to the word which is different from the others.

	<u>fée</u> 1	<u>mon</u> 2	<u>lait</u> 3	<u>jambe</u> 4	<u>plume</u> 5	<u>veau</u> 6	<u>nous</u> 7	<u>joli</u> 8	<u>patte</u> 9
A									
B									
C									
1									
2									
3									
4 etc.									

An answer sheet of this type could cover a wider range of vowel sounds if it were laid out at right angles on the page. A similar answer sheet could be used for tests of identification of consonant sounds.

In using this type of test, the teacher reminds pupils of the pronunciation of the example words at the head of the columns, and in particular of the sounds represented by the underlined letters. He then works some examples with the pupils. Three should be enough.

Only one word is spoken for each test item. The pupils must match the vowel sound in the word with the vowel sounds represented in the words at the head of the columns, and then put a tick in the appropriate column. There should

The actual test items might be:

Number One: *Loup*. — *Lu*. — *Loup*.

Number Two: *Fée*. — *Fi*. — *Fi*.

Number Three: *Brun*. — *Brin*. — *Brun*.

Number Four: *Peigne*. — *Peigne*. — *Peine*.

Number Five: *Fée*. — *Fée*. — *Fait*.

Number Six: *Chasse*. — *Chasse*. — *Chasse*.

Number Seven: *Fi*. — *Fée*. — *Fait*.

Number Eight: *Banc*. — *Banc*. — *Bon*.

and so on.

This type of test can be given on a small number of sound contrasts, with a number of examples of each sound contrast, or it can be given on a large number of sound contrasts with only one item based on each sound contrast. This type of test is essentially a *group test*.

1C.—Single sound aural perception test

Aural perception and identification of a limited number of sounds during a test can be handled quite well by providing a number of columns on the answer sheet and by using well-known words at the head of the columns. A typical answer sheet could be laid out in the following way:

be no predictable pattern in the occurrence of ticks in columns on the answer sheet.

The teacher's script for a test of vowel identification on the answer sheet set out above might be:

Example A: *Loup*. (PAUSE)

The vowel sound in that word is the same as the vowel sound in "nous", in column 7. Is your tick in column 7?

Example B: *Long*. (PAUSE)

The vowel sound in that word is the same as the vowel sound in "mon", in column 2. Is your tick in column 2?

Example C: *Nappe*. (PAUSE)

The vowel sound in that word is the same as the vowel sound in "patte", in column 9. Is your tick in column 9?

Now we will begin the test. Are you ready?

Number One: *Rue*. (PAUSE)
 Number Two: *Son*. (PAUSE)
 Number Three: *Mais*. (PAUSE)
 Number Four: *Sotte*. (PAUSE)
 Number Five: *Beau*. (PAUSE)
 Number Six: *Chat*. (PAUSE)
 Number Seven: *Banc*. (PAUSE)
 Number Eight: *Chou*. (PAUSE)
 Number Nine: *Né*. (PAUSE)
 etc.

There are two important considerations in giving this type of test. The first is that pupils should be thoroughly familiar with the pronunciation of the words at the head of the columns. The second is that they should be given adequate time to make up their minds and to put a tick in the column of their choice.

A similarly arranged answer sheet for a test of the identification of consonant sounds should be able to accommodate all or most of the French consonant sounds if laid out across the broader dimension of the page. While the test words for vowel sound identification should be monosyllables to avoid confusion through having two vowel sounds, some at least of the test words for consonant sounds can be of two syllables provided that only one consonant sound is involved. The test words for a consonant sound test could therefore be:

1. a monosyllable with a consonant sound at the beginning, but not at the end; or
2. a monosyllable, with a consonant sound at the end, but not at the beginning; or
3. a word of two syllables, with a consonant sound between two vowel sounds, but with no other consonant sound either at the beginning or at the end of the word.

Thus suitable test words for a consonant sound test would be:

*chou — joue — roue — tout — dit — pie — bu —
 cou — gant — oui — huis — huche — âge —
 heure — ôre — aide — huppe — aube — aille —
 agneau — oignon — achat — âgé — allons —
 aîné — heureux.*

This test is essentially a *group test*. It should be noted that this type of test is considerably harder than either the "Same/Different" perception test or the "Which word is different?" perception test. Pupils have to retain an auditory memory of the test word while they match this against each of the columns in turn.

2.—Objective tests of oral production of difficult French sounds

For a test in which each pupil gives evidence of his actual pronunciation of sounds, each

pupil must speak individually, preferably away from other pupils. Thus tests of oral production of difficult French sounds are essentially *individual tests*.

For this type of test, the teacher should make up a list of words to be spoken by the pupil, but each word owes its place in the list to the fact that the teacher is going to listen to *one sound only* in the word, ignoring other sounds. Thus the teacher needs to know which sound to listen for in each test word. It is difficult for a teacher to be objective if he is trying to listen to all sounds in a word while the pupil says it. It is easier to be objective if you can concentrate on how the pupil says *one certain sound* in each test word.

There are two types of test of oral production:

2A.—"Imitate each word I say!"

This is the teacher's sole instruction to the pupil. The teacher has a list of the words, with letters underlined to indicate to him which sound he is to listen for in each test word. The pupil must not be able to see the list.

The teacher has a scoring sheet before him, and records "right" or "wrong" for the pupil's pronunciation of each test word, i.e. of the specific sound in each test word. He ignores all sounds but the one in which he is interested as the pupil imitates any one word.

Note that this test combines both perception and production as far as the pupil is concerned, since he must first hear before he can imitate.

2B.—"Read each word in this list!"

The teacher has the list ready, hands it to the pupil, and then gives the instruction: "Read each word in this list!" The teacher has a scoring sheet which reproduces the list of words, but with letters underlined to indicate the sound he is to concentrate on in each test word. He simply records "right" or "wrong" against each item.

Note that this test involves a knowledge of the relationship of spelling and pronunciation as well as the ability to pronounce accurately. Perception is not involved for the pupil.

3.—Aural word-recognition tests

These tests are essentially *group tests*, pupils having a cyclostyled answer sheet in front of them while listening to the test items.

3A.—Aural word-identification test (with multiple-choice)

Pupils hear (but do not see) the test word. They hear each test word three times. On their answer sheet they find a multiple-choice item where they can give one of four answers for that item.

Thus pupils might hear three times the French word "sang". On their answer sheet, the multiple-choice item for this test word might be:

1. son ()
- sang ()
- sain ()
- Don't know ()

Pupils have to put a tick alongside the word they think they have heard. Hearing the test word three times, they are able to match the sound of the word against each possible spelling of the word before making their choice. The provision of the answer "Don't know" reduces the possibility of their achieving the right answer through guesswork.

The construction of individual items on the answer sheet is based on minimal trios of words, or on minimal pairs where trios do not exist. In the latter case, a third word vaguely similar in sound to the test word can be used to fill up the number. The position of the correct answer should be allocated at random to preclude any possibility of the position of correct answers being predictable.

Both vowel contrasts and consonant contrasts can be tested together in the one test. Obviously, the test sets out to test pupils' ability to hear accurately and to associate the appropriate spellings with the sounds they hear. It is essentially a *group test*.

3B.—Aural word-meaning test (with multiple-choice)

If English meanings of French words are known (and this is in no way inconsistent with an aural-oral approach), a similar test to the foregoing can be constructed, but with an English meaning of each French word instead of the French words themselves. Using the same test item as was used in the preceding test, pupils would hear the French word "sang" three times, while their answer sheet might give the following multiple-choice item:

1. sound ()
- blood ()
- healthy ()
- Don't know ()

The construction of each item is similar to that for the preceding test, except that an English meaning is put down for each of the three French words of confusable sound instead of

the three French words themselves. Pupils hear only one of the French words as the test word.

Again, the position of the correct answers should be allocated at random. Again, both vowel contrasts and consonant contrasts can be included in the same test.

Obviously, the test sets out to test pupils' ability to hear accurately and to associate English meanings with the French words they hear. It is obviously a *group test*.

4.—Objective tests of aural comprehension

Tests of aural comprehension are essentially *group tests*. They can be given at various levels of complexity. The test of aural comprehension may provide a number of isolated sentences which pupils hear one at a time. On their answer sheet is a set of multiple-choice possibilities for each sentence they hear. Each multiple-choice item consists of a number of statements in relation to the sentence they have just heard. Only one of the statements is correct; the others are misleading distractors. Enough time is allowed between the hearing of the individual sentences to allow pupils to make their choice in the multiple-choice items before hearing the next sentence.

The second level of complexity for aural comprehension testing provides for pupils to hear two or three connected sentences before they mark their choice in the multiple-choice item which applies to that group of sentences before hearing the next group.

The third, and most complex, level of aural comprehension testing provides for pupils to hear one longer passage, without being able to see the five or six multiple-choice sets which they must answer in order to reveal their aural comprehension of the entire passage. It should be noted that the one correct statement in a multiple-choice set should not be a direct quotation from the material pupils hear. While the correct statement should be based on the information provided in the passage, it should be expressed in other words.

It should also be noted that dictation is a partial test of aural comprehension.

5.—Objective aural-oral interview tests

Aural-oral interview tests are essentially *individual tests*. Very satisfactory aural-oral interview tests can be designed using ten questions which between them require a pupil to reveal in his answers his knowledge of a fair coverage of the content of his French course

up to the time of testing. A ten-question test can be scored quite objectively if three points are allotted for each item. The pupil scores three points if his answer to a question is absolutely appropriate and is grammatically correct. He scores two points if he made one or two grammatical errors. He scores one point if he obviously understood the question but could not frame and say a satisfactory answer. He receives no points if he obviously did not understand the question. Using this type of scoring, teachers will find that pupils will spread themselves over a range of scores 0-30 on a ten-question test.

Immediately the pupil has completed his last answer, the teacher can allocate a further ten points — up to five points for the pupil's rate of reaction and readiness of response, and up to five points for the general standard of his pronunciation, speech-phrasing and intonation.

Thus for ten carefully thought out questions (with possibly parallel forms for use alternately or at random) the teacher can assess his pupils in an aural-oral interview and spread them over a range of scores 0-40.

6.—Objective tests of oral self-expression

The stimulus for this kind of test, which is essentially an *individual test*, could be a series of pictures which between them make up a story. The tense-form to be used by the pupil can be indicated very easily through one introductory statement or question by the teacher as he puts the series of pictures before the pupil.

The system of scoring tests of oral self-expression objectively could well be the same as the system used in the preceding section for the scoring of aural-oral interviews.

It would be an advantage to have two or three parallel forms of the series of pictures to be used in turn or at random.

General comments on objective tests of an aural-oral command

All of the tests described in this article can be used as attainment tests under examination conditions, but they all have a diagnostic value in that they reveal areas of weakness to the teacher who uses them throughout the course.

In those tests where pupils make marks on their answer sheets, the great advantage of the types of test given is that pupils' answers will be in the same position on all copies of the answer sheet. This fact alone simplifies the teacher's scoring of the tests, since he can pro-

duce a scoring mask for each page of a test at the same time as he prepares that page for cyclostyling.

Even in those tests which require pupils to be tested one by one, the teacher's task is made much easier if he arranges for a cyclostyled sheet providing for each pupil's attempt at the test. Thus a cyclostyled sheet for the aural-oral interview could set out the actual questions the teacher is going to ask, together with the possible points for each answer and a space in which the pupil's score on each answer is to be entered. The sheet will also remind the teacher that he is going to allocate two further groups of points on this test. All the teacher has to do when a new pupil comes in is to reach for another cyclostyled sheet and to write the pupil's name on it. He then asks the questions in turn, scoring each response as he goes. When the last response has been given and scored, he allocates the two extra groups of points. He can total the score during the change-over of pupils, and is then ready for the next pupil. He has a record of each pupil's performance for later reference.

It is by no means suggested that teachers should use *all* the types of test described in this article in the one examination. Some types of test may suit a teacher better than others, and he can certainly select that combination of tests which suits his purposes best. Even so, he may like to try out all the types of test described at some stage of the course.

Objective tests are very searching, and will certainly search out those pupils who do not know all aspects of their work well. On the other hand, what are teachers to do with classes which have worked well and which tend to group themselves towards the top of the scale of possible points for a group of objective tests. One's tendency is to say: "Obviously raise the pass mark!" Another tendency is to say that the tests must have been too easy. The tests are not necessarily too easy at all; possibly they are too fair to pupils, because they give them the chance to reveal their knowledge of French over a large number of small points and give credit for adequate knowledge. On the question of raising the pass mark, certainly it can be raised, but only to a level which will automatically fail pupils who obviously do not know well enough the French they have been taught — and not to a level which will automatically fail a certain number of pupils to satisfy the requirements of some statistical curve!